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Mineral King Monument Status Asked

By RAY STEELE JR.
Bee Staff Writer

The National Parks & Conservation Association wants the federal government to make Mineral King a national monument and abandon plans to turn the 16,000-acre alpine valley into a ski resort.

The national monument designation for the High Sierra Nevada valley in eastern Tulare County would protect the area from development and kill attempts to turn it into a ski resort.

The association, founded in 1919 as a nonprofit conservation group, has written to President Gerald R. Ford, urging him to use an executive order to make Mineral King a national monument.

The land would have to be transferred from the Agriculture Department to the Interior Department.

Anthony Wayne Smith, president and general counsel for the National Parks & Conservation Association, said Mineral King would have been included in Sequoia National Park when it was established "except there was mining."

Instead, the area was put under the U.S. Forest Service. However, mining operations in the area have been abandoned.

Smith said Mineral King could be

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managed as a unit of Sequoia National Park, which borders Mineral King on the east and north sides, or it could be added to the park by Congress.

Either way, attempts to develop a massive ski resort should be abandoned, Smith said.

Mineral King has been the focus of turmoil between conservation groups, which want it left as it is, and Walt Disney Productions, which won the right 10 years ago to develop the area into a year-round recreation area.

The draft environment impact statement issued by the Forest Service in December proposed a recreation center with 18 ski lifts and other facilities for about 10,000 visitors a day during the winter.

The 300-page study urges lodging be provided for 6,000 persons and the establishment of four walk-in campsites capable of handling 1,325 persons and 15 miles of new hiking trails for summer users.

The study, which was required by the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act, also recommends either a cog-assisted railway or bus service be provided to get people from the 3,600-car parking lot at Oak Grove to Mineral King 18 miles away

Smith said development, including such things as large lodging facilities and parking lots, would destroy "one of the most beautiful valleys in the world."

He said public transit should be provided into and within Sequoia National Park "to reduce traffic there and later to Mineral King."

The National Parks & Conservation Association joins the Sierra Club in urging Mineral King be kept in its natural state.

The Sierra Club filed suit in 1969 to prevent development of Mineral King and both Disney and the Forest Service admit no development could take place until the suit is settled.

Smith said inclusion of Mineral King as a national monument, similar to Death Valley, would forever kill large-scale development.

In his letter to Ford, Smith said, "Inclusion of Mineral King in the National Park System as a national monument could be a spectacular demonstration of your interest as President in the conservation of natural resources and protection of the human environment."

Smith said his group also has filed objections to the environmental impact statement with the U.S. Forest Service.